Brooklyn Dec 2. 1877

For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.

Matt 18.20

012-010-628

This text - as it is very well known, has been much cited as a scriptural basis and authority for Congregationalism. Jesus does not say that where there is a priesthood, a Presbyter or a Bishop, there he will be - but simply promises his presence to any two or three who shall meet in his name - though no one of them may bear an ecclesiastical title or office. - Therefore the Congregationalist asserts that any number of people professing the Christian name may constitute a true Christian church, though there is no laying on of hands - and no pretense of having received authority through apostolic succession. -

It may not be amiss to remark - since this question of Church form is destined at no late day to come before the world once more for discussion, that the Congregationalist does not quarrel with the right of any body of believers to have Priests and Bishops. - He only quarrels with their assumption that these in some superior sense make a Church. - He declares that the Church itself of not Christ, appointed its officers, and denies that through apostolic succession or otherwise, they have received any authority to bind or bind the consciences of other christians. -

But my present business with this text does not lead me to take up this question, great as is its historic interest and significance,- except as I hope to reach something that lies back of it, and furnishes a better reason than congregationalists themselves have generally assigned, why there is is the true form of church organization.-

I ask you to notice that the agreement ~~and~~ only ~~was~~ ~~it~~ was hasty, & ~~is~~ becomes - in the light of this text, as efficacious as the unanimous resolution of a whole church congress.- Their union may be a complete union,- and out of it may grow all that union can ever produce,- Though you add to the two or three, hundreds and thousands; you only add to the number of those who partake of the blessings of fellowship - without adding at all it may be, to the potency of fellowship itself. —

An Electric circuit is made by connecting the two ends of a wire with the earth,- The wire may be a few feet or thousands of miles in length,- it may be supported by one or two or by a vast number of

poles,- The circuit in either case is complete, and messages may be ~~so~~ sent over it with equal accuracy, so that by means of the earth - positive and negative poles are brought together.- It is a question of quality and condition rather than of quantity.- The quantity of electric force, if we may speak of quantity - when we have no means of measuring it, is entirely a relative affair, and must be proportioned to the distance to be traversed and the work to be done.- But the quality of the force and the conditions of its manifestation are absolute.- Quantity of force adds nothing but quantity to the phenomena,- no new order of facts is developed by increasing the length of the telegraphic wire or adding to the power of the galvanic battery.- So there is a "somewhat - not ourselves" a spiritual world in which our minds inhabit- and through which we are able to complete a spiritual circuit of communication and force, between two human souls,- It is here a question of quality and condition rather than of quantity,- A spiritual chunk may

embrace two- or thousands of members,- but the quality and conditions of ~~the~~ spiritual fellowship remain the same,- It can only arise through ~~a common~~ connection with the spiritual world,- and it was because Jesus stood for his disciples as the type and symbol of spiritual things. that he left this promise to those who should meet in his name.- Certainly in that day. whatever may be true now- to meet in the name of Christ was to meet through a common relation to the unseen, Power of Wisdom and Holiness, which ~~is~~ is the basis of all in us better than mere sensual existence,-

Let us now, if you please, drop the word condition, and the text brings to our notice the respective importance of quality and quantity.- I say the quality of fellowship may be just as fine, and it may have all the strength nobility and helpfulness it can ever have- when it is fellowship between two ~~or three~~ instead of a multitude of hearts.-

So it will be found everywhere that quality is not contingent upon ~~size~~.- The microscope has revealed to

us a new world,- hitherto undreamed of,- and has shown us ~~x~~ that a drop of ~~water~~ water is full of swarming life which possesses instincts and powers like those of larger animals which walk the earth.- It is even ~~it~~ beyond that every atom of seemingly solid material like the rocks, is a microscopic world- having its orbit of revolution,- so that it may perfectly obey and illustrate the laws of gravitation.- We know that all the gorgeous hues of sunset- may be reproduced upon a field so small that the naked eye cannot detect it.- Nature can paint a rainbow just as perfectly upon the minute ~~part~~ fraction of a square inch,- as upon the illimitable expanse of sky above us.- Quality, in its perfection- may exist in the infinitely small as well as in the infinitely large.- No one knows this better than the chemist- who in large and complex mixtures is able to detect the slightest trace of minute chemical ~~substance~~ elements.- Let any particle of metallic substance be held in solution, and widely diffused by dilution through a quantity of liquid,- the

Chemist by his tests will reveal the presence of that metal and show you that its every minute atom has the same properties which belong to it when it exists in masses. — But quality is not only thus independent of ~~to~~ quantity — it is more important than size, and will always in the end prevail against quantity. — That is to say the question of superiority — is in the end a question of the best and strongest quality — not a question of what is largest in numbers or space. — And this might be abundantly illustrated from the inanimate world. — Lady Macbeths " red right hand " has been so often held up to view of late by a a popular Lecturer, that it may not be amiss to quote her Husbands saying. —

" Will all great Neptunes ocean wash this blood
" Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
" The Multitudinous seas incarnadine
" Making the green - one red. "

~~Doubtless~~ Of course this is a fanciful statement. — The red stain of the murderer - is not so much more potent than the

the green of the sea. — But it is true nevertheless that we cannot set limits to the power possessed by some active agents to pollute or purify — earth sea and air. — It has been recently stated in one of our scientific journals that a stratum of atmosphere may be changed throughout by the dropping into it of a single flake of snow. — We know how some odors will diffuse themselves through great volumes of air, and how the poisonous seeds of disease may be carried wide over the face of the earth, without losing their fatal power. —

Everywhere size is a relative matter of secondary importance, and quality is first to be considered. — The Spider swings upon his tiny thread, as surely as if it were a ships' cable. — The cobweb of wires which spans the torrent of Niagara is as safe a bridge as could be made upon the massive pillars and arches of the Roman aqueduct. —

I do not mean to say that size or quantity is of no account, but only that it ranks below quality, and that the superior force though acting through a small

material body - will always prevail against the inferior force - though this can call to its aid the inertia of vast material bulk. - Let us take this truth into the world of human affairs, and see what it means there. - It means that the man or the organization of men which has in it stronger moral and mental qualities, is more powerful than the masses, - and however brute physical strength may triumph in the day of mob violence, the greater intellect will always, in the end make lesser intellects its followers. - The French Revolution could destroy an aristocracy founded upon inherited privilege - but it could not legislate out of existence the aristocracy founded upon superior political capacity. but fell itself a victim to the mental giants - like Danton and Napoleon whom it had produced. - For always the men who have a stronger purpose and clearer sight than their fellows will be their leaders. It is as true here in America as ever it was in aristocratic Europe - that the few govern the many -

These few may not themselves be very wise it is true, and they may rule by the light of the worst fallacies ~~and~~ as they perpetrate the worst of abuses. — But the ignorant man is always in great measure defenceless before the less ignorant, though it be only a shade of ignorance which separates them. — Ultimately however the leader who does not know, succumbs to the leader who has knowledge. — So that at last though it may take years — or even generations to work the result, the opinions of the wisest will prevail. — This ~~fact~~ is the absolutely certain fact, and no scheme or system hitherto made or yet to be devised — will evade or obliterate it. — ~~This~~ Under the Empire the Plebiscite was always sure to echo the Emperors will. — and here, though we talk proudly about the will of the people, our ballot boxes give us nothing more than the will of certain political leaders, who make their views known to the people. — Mr. Carlyle has first and last made considerable sport of our institutions

and in his unique way - has set forth the folly of trying to find the wisest public measures by a count of heads. - He is always telling us that the rule of the majority - reverses the whole order of the world in that it puts ignorance in command ~~of~~ over wisdom and virtue. Now if it were possible to settle anything by a count of heads - how Carlyle's predictions of woe to republican America would be abundantly justified. - But what ever has been or ever can be settled in this manner? - - No political system can annihilate the fundamental facts and laws of human society; and whether suffrage is universal or limited - the judgement of the nation is always the judgement of certain representative men, who lead the public thought. In a Monarchy - the King can only rule when he is by nature a leader of men. - If he lack all Kingly qualities, he becomes the tool of abler minds that rule in his stead. In a Democracy or republic - it is much more true that the master of political affairs gets into the strongest hands that offer themselves for the service. - Bad men

under free institutions never drift into public office by accident. — Their presence there means always that in some respect they have keener faculties than the men who elected them. — It may be only a supreme genius for lying — or it may be the power to get money, — but generally speaking, there must be something in a man keener — stronger, wiser, or better than the average of humanity — to enable him to get into any prominent place before the country. — So that universal suffrage does not really select or ~~set~~ unselect anything. — The multitude is in the hands of its leaders, their will is its will, — their conscience its conscience. — Our Country is ruled by an aristocracy as much as any ~~people~~ Country that ever existed, and people of "quality" ~~or~~ may have just as much influence here as they have abroad. — It is asserted boastfully on the one hand and lamentingly on the other that the vote of the ignorant man weighs as much as that of the intelligent. It is not true, — for the vote of the ignorant man is always cast by someone more intelligent than himself — to whom he looks for guidance. —

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Really our voting is done by the more intelligent classes and his ballot weighs heaviest who has the gift, or is in the possession of authority like the Priests, or who will will take upon himself the necessary labor, to win among his fellow citizens the largest following.—

One of the most common errors in treating of popular governments - is to suppose that the will of the Multitude is in command.— It is not so, - The will of the few who have, and exercise the ability to shape the public thought, is always the ruling power.— Here as elsewhere quality is stronger than quantity.— But what then have we gained by our free institutions? We have gained just this much,—(and if at this season we give thanks for our blessings we should remember this as one of our chief reasons for being grateful) we have gained ~~a~~ opportunity for the best qualities of manhood & womanhood to come to the front and assume their rightful place wherever they may have originated.— We have given up setting apart a certain caste, and expelling it

always to be fit to govern, (which involves the uncomfortable necessity of trying to make believe occasionally that the most unworthy sons of noble fathers do inherit a capacity to rule,—) and we have learned that the life of the people will naturally produce and put in command its rightful leaders, ~~though~~ without any clause in our written constitution providing that this shall be done,— Our Aristocracy is never separated from the people,— Its ranks are always open to receive those who rule by the only divine right, that of natural endowment, and it is never loaded down by a weight of incompetency, which chances to have high blood in its veins,— Our rulers must always be closely identified with the ~~x~~ wishes and feelings of the multitude from which they spring— and since it is impossible to ~~mark them off into~~ mark them off with a distinct caste, they must always belong to the people rather than to any special class,— In a word they are such as the natural laws governing society entrust with the mission of guiding the public mind,— Our gain is that we have approached more nearly

8 a society governed by the laws of God, rather than by artificial customs and systems of mans contrivance. We ought to expect some substantial benefit from this, and in point of fact we may safely challenge comparison between our two hundred years of history colonial and national, and an equal period in the life of any other people. — It will be found that under all the disadvantages of our position, cursed as we have been by the ~~system~~ members of slavery, and overrun by a tide of emigration composed of elements least capable of self-government, — it will be found notwithstanding all this that in all wide affairs we have found the right man for the right place, much oftener and with much less delay — I had almost said than any other country, and if we except England, I do not hesitate to make the statement. Take any list of kings or nobles ruling by right of birth and see how many ~~few~~ of them after all are unfit to rule at all! — The English are by far the most fortunate of all peoples in this respect, — But

who can read the history of the ~~House of~~ Stuart Kings and not feel that they have paid a heavy price for the really great men & women that their nobility has given them. — Now we have made mistakes and very sad ones ~~too~~ indeed in choosing our leaders. — ~~On the whole~~ one is often made to feel in reading our history that if the whole people had willed to do wrong instead of right, they could not have made a much worse mess of it. — But on the whole take the two hundred years — and set them side by side with any other national record, and it will be seen that a free society can be safely trusted to find those who are best fitted to think and act for their fellows in all affairs of public interest. —

I affirm then that not only are we bound to see in human affairs a providential purpose that the men & women who possess the strongest and best qualities of mind shall influence and lead other minds — but we are bound to trust Providence to furnish and select the minds capable of bearing sway. — The laws of the

world will not turn the current of inspiration and insight into a channel of mans selection, but will make choice for themselves of souls which are to be touched with prophetic fire. — It is the theory of the Roman Church that the Bishop of Rome must always be inspired. — So it is the theory of an aristocratic system that certain families possess and transmit to all generations a superior genius for controlling public affairs. — Neither theory can for an instant bear the test of comparison with actual fact. — Inspiration ~~is not confined with~~ does not attend any official station, and the families which have long possessed and transmitted distinguished ability are the very rare exceptions. — The theory is good for nothing. — The world must take great minds when it can find them, and can no more determine that they will spring from a given family, or ~~find~~ predict they when they will be found, than it can prophesy when the lightning will fall. — This must be our plea for our free institutions before the world, — and upon this ground must we meet all

aristocratic theories and tendencies. There is no sense in our trying to pretend that all men have an equal voice in making the laws by which they are governed. — We must justify ourselves by the ~~proud truth~~ fact that the few who make our laws — are on the whole the wisest men we can get to do it — and that the highest sense of the nation most readily rises into command, ~~than~~ when low born merit has fewest social prejudices to encounter. —

I have no time to defend this position as I should like. — But let me say that a social system must not be judged by any momentary glimpse of it. — We seem to have plenty of foolish men in our legislative Halls. But who supposes that either branch of Congress would be any wiser — if its members took their seats by right of birth? — Other peoples have had their periods of delusion and folly, and have found themselves in positions out of which it has taken them a long while to find the way. — Our system is not to be condemned for failing into the same tangle, that has perplexed every other,

but is rather to be applauded, if as we have every reason to believe, it will enable us to get out of our difficulties quicker than any other.- We may indulge in hero worship as ardently as Mr Carlyle - and exclaim what a fine thing it would be - if we had a Frederick the great to help us.- But, fortunately or unfortunately we have no Frederick the great, nor could we have had a political system which would have insured us one.- And therein lies the whole story.— Quality must rule over quantity.- but we must take such qualities as naturally find their way to power, and can have no ~~will which~~ contrived plan for providing ourselves with wise and inspired leaders.—

Turning now from the world of politics - to that of religion - we come back again to this question of Congregationalism,-- That stands or ought to stand upon the truth that no class of mortals by virtue of their official station has authority or ability to decide what is the highest religious truth,-- What an absurd notion it is that the majority of a church Council

can seem what are correct theological opinions! — Church councils did once seem that the earth was flat and covered by a chrystalline dome, — But it is not recorded that the shape of the earth underwent any alteration when the opinion of Church Councils changed, and indeed it is probable that their decrees never affected its shape at all. — So it is probable that the real truth about the nature of God and his government of the world has been in no wise established by the various convocations of Bishops which have given the world its creeds. — The truth of God is eternal, and it is made manifest to human hearts — not by any vote of church officials — but by such illumined minds as those of Jesus & Paul, Father — Wesley — Swedenborg and Channing. — The central position of congregationalism is, — not that in matters of belief the world must follow those whom Heaven has ordained its prophets, not those whom men have ordained their priests. — It is not to be expected that each individual will or can fashion his or her own creed without help, — and it is

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seem that as people recognize a common ~~creed~~ leader of religious thought, there must always be more or less uniformity of belief. — But ~~as~~ Congregationalism declares that when men attempt to create an artificial uniformity by fixing arbitrarily upon some oracle of religious truth and forcing the people to hold life or liberty or property on condition of their accepting this authority, that then the laws and methods of God working are very seriously interfered with and thwarted, to the hurt of all human interests. — There is of course a possibility that men who are high in ecclesiastical authority may be specially enlightened. — But not once in — how many hundred times shall we say? is ~~there~~ any probability of this. — You can no more make sure of it than you can make sure that a king will be good wise, and that as history shows, is equivalent to calling it very ~~so~~ uncertain. — So far as the Church is a temporal concern — let it have what officers it pleases. — But so far as it is a spiritual organization it must take what rulers

God pleases, for spite of all the resolutions of its tilled dignitaries the church must ultimately shape its belief under the direction of those ~~upon~~ to whom Heaven has sent its gifts of spiritual insight and force. — It is a serious thing to interfere with God's method ~~for~~ of enlightening the world, by using the power of the state to force men to adopt any particular spiritual guide, — and that is done, even here, in so far as a denomination can invoke the aid of our laws to make the holding of church property contingent upon ~~the profession~~ adherence of its belief. — Men must have some spiritual guide, — But the laws of God will take care of that, and it is our business to see that they have opportunity to follow that guide who can best convince their minds of truth and determine their hearts toward virtue. This I take it is the true basis of the congregational idea, — That it means ~~ultimately~~ as some ultimately assert - very much for himself in religion, and no religious organization at all I utterly deny. — It is results simply ~~from~~ from the application of the true democratic spirit - which breathes in every line of the Gospels to the sphere of religious life and work.

that is a hideous perversion of the democratic spirit which
This is to ignore the fact that as long as one man is wiser than another,
than another, this other will necessarily make him a leader.
As long as the world stands, there must be the comparatively few who will
lead the way, and the many who will follow. — The true
democratic idea is that these leaders shall be such as the
sense of the people shall designate — not such as acquire
the place by purchase or inherited privilege. — Let society
settle for itself year by year and generation by generation
who are its statesmen and seers, — and abandon this
notion that statesmen and seers are born of any special
line, or of that great qualities of mind and soul hover about
any special office and alight upon whatever mortal is
placed therein. — This I suppose is the message which
our American life has to deliver to the world, as it
certainly is the proclamation which congregationalism
made long ago. — This is a tempting theme, and
one which leads to many special topics of great
interest and importance. — But we must not be

drawn away from the line of thought - with which we started. - Quality then it is affirmed rules over quantity, and the strongest qualities of mind must make their own way to power and influence. - That only is true authority which represents the native power of a great soul to win the respect and obedience of the multitude. But now what are the strongest qualities of mind, which do enable one man to govern thousands of his fellows? All answers to this question may be submitted to the proof of facts, - so that we are not left to theory alone. - Doubtless our answer must depend somewhat upon whether our field of observation is wide or narrow. - For on every side of us rises the clamor of demagogues, who succeed in making themselves very popular by the profusion of cheap gifts and the use of shallow devices. - The ease with which men can make for themselves a reputation and get to be the hero of the hour, are at first quite startling, to one who believes in a world of sober realities. - There is among us - whose history is so

brief and has wrought so little into our natures, a disposition to believe that what we call "smartness" and is mere shrewdness and cunning, is the strongest element of mental power.— Apparently men do succeed in winning a large following - whose wisdom consists in nothing more than the ability to string together a mass of high sounding but empty phrases — and whose influence is only won by playing the part of a skilful broker to claimants of government patronage.— But the success of such men does not result more from the stupidity of the multitude than from the lack of public spirit among men who are better fitted for leaders.— Men of real ability, who can make their fortune in quiet do not often attempt to gain the public ear. ~~because they can make their fortune~~ so often as they who depend upon making their fortunes through public life.— When the strongest qualities do not contest the field — of course the weaker will bear off the palm of victory. The success of the Demagogue is no evidence that the man of sense cannot succeed better, when he tries to influence

to considerable extent

public opinion, — Men are stupid and easily deceived by shows; there is no denying that fact, — But they have after all a keener appreciation of worth than they generally get credit for, — And when there comes any strain upon society which brings all its forces into play — or when we look over the broader field on which runs our actors, it becomes perfectly evident that the strongest element or quality of human nature is the moral sense, — Last sunday I took occasion to speak of the difficulties which the higher moral truth has always to encounter, To say I wish to emphasize the fact that notwithstanding all difficulties, the higher moral truth is sure to win, — There is no social or ecclesiastical forces of defence strong enough to stand against it and block up its pathway, — You may mark it well that the person who possesses a strong moral sense is always a person of influence, and that no man has such power as a leader of men, as he who can appeal to and arouse their consciences, —

The Man who stands in any contest for simple right — and justice — is sure in the end to prevail over all tricks of policy. — Notwithstanding all the worlds selfishness and meanness, it is drawn by laws and forces as absolute as gravitation to great moral qualities. It cannot choose but recognize — and in the end acknowledge that it recognizes the authority of heavens justice, by whomsoever its supreme behests may be declared. — I dare say this all sounds commonplace enough. — But who really feels the weight of its meaning? It is the fashion now-a-days — to make much of the fallability of conscience, and to find its roots in ancient prejudices which do not mean much after all. — The world needs to be on its guard against that philosophy which gives a new license to self-interest by discrediting the validity of moral ideas. — For as surely as we live at all we cannot wrong our fellows with impunity, however great our power over them or may be the present gain. — The gospel which Jesus preached in behalf of the poor the despised and forsaken

is to day our Judge, - men may plunder the defenceless and stand in no fear of any human retributive agency. But as certainly as we are subject to the laws of God, those laws will exact the penalty of the crime, - Moral laws and forces are supreme in this world of ours - and this apostle is stronger in their might - than all the millions who may at first oppose him, - what was Jesus but a new voice of the eternal righteousness, declaring the commands of the very highest moral sense, - Who doubts that if his disciples had gone out into the world to preach some philosophical speculations, instead of Christs laws of holy living their mission would have ended in speedy defeat. - An enthusiasm for purity and justice was the strength of their movement, as it has been the strength of every movement that has contributed anything to the worlds advance, - The soul, to-day, which looks out over society - and seeing the wrong now practised where right ought to be done - devotes itself to proclaiming by word and deed the higher moral truth, is the soul

that holds heavens commission to be a guide and ruler of men. The world, I fear, is too much given to noticing light of certain people in its midst called "reformers" because of their extravagant theories. Doubtless many of them are advocating views all the way from Utopian to vicious, which are as more likely ever to be adopted by the world, than our bodies are likely to develop wings.— But let their theories be what they may, so far as they see and denounce what is wrong, and can make men feel the force of their denunciations, they have in them a moral force which does its work underneath all intellectual fogs, and which nobody can afford to despise.— Duality ~~is stronger~~ Triumphs over gravity,— not by virtue of man's enactments but in accordance with the everlasting decree of the Almighty— and ~~that~~ the moral is that strongest quality which in the persons of its highest representives conquers all the earth.—

I have only to say in conclusion, that when we be met together in the name of Jesus, in any such sense as he himself used the words— except the

melting together with his lofty moral purposes in view. His life and all its aims are wofully traduced, by those who only meet to do him personal homage, — His gospel has been adopted by two parties; one of whom found it a convenient new dress for old paganism, while the other saw in it, its core of moral life. — It matters not the respective size of these two parties, the latter is that through which Christianity does its work and by which it is to be judged. — The Calvinist drew his theology from the writings of Paul. — but from the words of Christ he caught that intense moral earnestness & conviction which made him the best soldier of liberty the world has ever seen. — I have not an instants doubt that Christianity is to be the worlds dominant religion. — I mean of course not the christianity of forms and creeds, but that which seeks to establish the heavenly kingdom which Jesus preached. — His gospel is not a complete moral science — or system — and we may be devoutly thankful that it is not, — But its declarations of the fundamental principles of righteousness

which 1800 years have in no wise added to - or improved,
and, indeed, to the sublimity of which the world but just now seems
awaking, - these are filled to stand, and I have no doubt
will stand so for into the future, as we have any interest or
concern - as the great basis upon which men will work
together, to uplift and purify our humanity. - Christ's Gospel
has in it - and in a supreme degree, just this moral
energy of which I have been speaking, - and I am fully
persuaded that it will perfectly illustrate the thought I have
tried to make plain, that whoever and whatever possesses
this highest attribute or quality of being, shows the throne
of the Almighty, and conquers the world through the might
of His name. — —